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ABSTRACT

This digest examines the community college's role in helping to fill the current and projected shortage of public school teachers due to increases in the number of teachers retiring and students enrolling. Teacher shortages are most evident in both urban and rural school districts and in the fields of science, mathematics and technology. The digest advocates the recruitment of minority students who are interested in teaching. Minority educators are underrepresented in the teacher population and have been shown to be effective in responding to minority students' educational and social needs. Community colleges, with their large student population in general and minority student body in particular, have an important role in training future educators. Several types of teacher education programs have been established at these campuses, including 2+2 partnerships and baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate programs. The 2+2 programs provide a seamless transition between two- and four-year institutions for students committed to teacher education. In addition, post-baccalaureate programs offered through community colleges allow students who already have a bachelor's degree to obtain a teaching credential through online courses. (Contains 10 references.) (JCC)

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By

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Digest

May, 2002 EDO-JC-02-05

Teacher Education at the Community College: Partnership and Collaboration

By Robin Allen

The U.S. Department of Education predicts that nearly 40% of public school teachers will retire within the next few years. This prospect, coupled with a dramatic rise in school enrollments, means that the United States can anticipate hiring two million new elementary and secondary teachers in the next decade (Stroup, 2002). Therefore, many states, and many institutions of higher education, are exploring new possibilities for recruiting, training, and retaining teachers. Community colleges in particular are examining their role in helping to meet the need for teachers in their own communities, and at least 20 states are looking to community colleges to help train teachers (Evelyn, 2002). These institutions have large pools of students from which prospective teachers can be recruited, and for many of those students, community colleges are their first exposure to higher education. Further, educators have concluded that teacher preparation is consistent with the community-based and student-centered missions of two-year colleges (Bragg, 1998). This digest will describe where the need for new teachers is greatest and discuss some examples of innovative programs already in place at community colleges across the country.

Meeting the Need for Teachers

Current and anticipated teacher shortages create several distinct needs. In academics, the need is greatest for science, mathematics and technology teachers (Bragg, 1998), while geographically, the need for teachers of all types is greatest in urban and rural school districts (Gerdeman, 2001). Community colleges are a natural fit in helping to meet the demand for teachers in these areas because they have the students, support services, and articulation mechanisms already in place to recruit and train prospective teachers (Curry, 1988). About 40 percent of current math and science teachers have completed at least some of their math and science courses at a community college (Bragg, 1998), making two-year schools a prime choice in finding future teachers in these academic areas. In addition, many two-year colleges are located in the geographic areas with the greatest need for new teachers. Potential teachers can be recruited within these communities, with the goal of returning students to those same communities as teachers, once they have been trained.

There is also a great need to increase the number of minority teachers (Anglin, Mooradian, and Hamilton, 1993; Eubanks and Weaver, 2000). Minority children make up about 30% of all public elementary and secondary school students, but minority educators make up only 13% of the public school teacher workforce (NCES, 1997). Research suggests that minority educators are important because they tend to be more responsive to children's cultural backgrounds, they hold higher expectations for minority children, and they tend to incorporate social reform into their teaching. In addition, the global marketplace requires educators who reflect the cultural diversity children will encounter later in life (Eubanks and Weaver, 2000). Since over half of all minorities enrolled in higher education attend community colleges (NCES, 1991), community colleges are a natural choice for recruiting minorities into the teaching profession.

Community College Teacher Education Programs

Community colleges are attempting to meet the challenge of providing new teachers to their communities through a variety of programs. Many of the new programs involve collaborating with other educational institutions in recruiting and educating potential teachers. Some involve encouraging people who already have bachelor's degrees to obtain a teaching certificate at the community college, and a few involve offering four-year teaching degrees at the community college.

2 + 2 Partnerships

Many states, and many institutions of higher education, have established 2 + 2 articulation or joint registration agreements between community colleges and local universities for teacher education programs. These programs allow students to finish the first two years of a teacher preparation program at the community college, often earning an associate's degree, and then go on to obtain their bachelor's degree at a four-year institution. Since community college students who might be interested in teaching often do not self-identify, 2 + 2 programs use community college faculty and administrators to actively recruit students who might be interested in such a career. Some programs locate candidates by identifying high academic achievers, while others target traditional-age students, minority students, undeclared students, intellectually gifted students, students already employed as teacher aides, or mid-career students who have returned to school seeking a career change (Anglin, Mooradian, and Hamilton, 1993).

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The 2 + 2 programs are different from regular articulation agreements because, in many of the 2 + 2 programs, students are simultaneously admitted, registered and enrolled in both the two-year and four-year institutions. Both institutions provide support services to the students, making sure that they enroll in the proper courses and are able to obtain financial aid. These services help to provide a seamless transition to the four-year school. Some 2 + 2 programs also incorporate local middle and high schools, using them to recruit prospective teachers. These schools then become available for teacher education field work and placement sites for students upon graduation (Anglin, 1989, Bragg, 1998; Gerdeman, 2001).

Community colleges in Maryland, for example, which as of last summer had 10,000 openings for elementary and secondary schoolteachers, now offer an associate of arts in teaching. The curriculum for the two-year degree in teaching mirrors that of the first two years of a four-year degree, and includes courses in educational psychology and special education. Students also complete fieldwork in local schools, and by meeting specified GPA and testing requirements, all of their coursework is transferable to state universities. Students then complete the second part of the 2 + 2 program at the universities. Other states, such as Arizona, California, and Texas, are following suit with ideas for similar programs (Evelyn, 2000).

Baccalaureate and Post-baccalaureate Programs

Some community colleges are considering, or already have in place, plans that allow people who already have bachelor's degrees to become certified as teachers. In Arizona, Maricopa Community College District allows people with bachelor's degrees to earn teacher certification on-line in one or two years (Evelyn, 2002). Programs such as this help to recruit mid-career professionals, who have been laid off or are considering a career change, into the teaching profession.

Community colleges in other states are implementing even more ambitious programs. In Florida, St. Petersburg Junior College, formerly a two-year institution, has been renamed St. Petersburg College and will soon begin offering four-year bachelor's degrees in teacher education. The teacher education degree includes upper division courses in teaching science and math. Other community colleges in Florida are also beginning to move in this direction. In Nevada, Great Basin College already offers a similar bachelor's degree program (Evelyn, 2002).

Conclusion

Community colleges are engaged in a variety of programs to help mitigate the current and anticipated teacher shortage. The most comprehensive efforts involve active recruitment of prospective teachers and seamless transition from two- to four- year institutions. Community colleges have diverse student populations and are often located in geographical areas in need of teachers, making them natural partners in the teacher education pipeline. If America is to recruit over 2 million new teachers in the next decade, community colleges must continue to provide active leadership and innovative programs in order to train America's next generation of teachers.

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